XMBCM

"Xanadu May Be Computer McDonald's"

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Sept 29, 1979

Home information touted

By Hope Kamin

It's the sort of Kubla Khan-meets-Citizen Kane scenario that might send Samuel Coleridge into a roll.

It is the Xanadu Information System currently being developed by home computer zealot Ted Nelson and 12 "very brilliant and eccentric" programmers holed up at the Nelson homestead in a Philadelphia suburb.

Nelson, a sociologist by education, was in Winnipeg this week to get a closer look at the Manitoba Telephone System's home computer experiment, IDA, which begins in Headingley in January. He called it "the first sweeping experiment of its kind."

He explained the Xanadu system as "an electronic public access data repository and publishing medium and archive."

Anyone with a home computer terminal will be able to tap into the system by subscribing at the local Xanadu office.

Nelson, too, plans to tap into the system.

"I hope to franchise it — like McDonald's."

The Xanadu system is the sort of "software" that could be used in the MTS home computer system in the future, MTS spokeswoman Carolyn Rickey said.

MTS system compatible

"It would be compatible with our system," she said. "We'll have the network and he has the software."

However, Ms. Rickey said MTS has made no plans to include such a system. Nelson said he expects the Xanadu framework to be ready for experiment by next year.

The author of *Computer Lib*, a $7 guide whose kicker is "you can and must understand computers **NOW**", says "the public notion of computers is totally wrong."

"Most people view the computer as a threatening monolith that is dehumanizing society. What *is* dehumanizing society is the way computers have been used."

Nelson maintains computers in themselves are not the complex, alienating machines the major computer companies have made them out to be.

"If it hadn't been for IBM, personal computers would have been around 10 years ago.

"We can be liberated by computers by getting information we didn't have access to before."

A well-rounded person himself, Nelson will join Parker Brothers in October to help advertise "Merlin", a computerized toy which can engage in six different games.

The key to Nelson's computer philosophy is his belief that the need for sequential information is only a function of the print medium, of writing.

"Writing is a way of splicing pieces of information together. We need the sequence. In the screen writing of the future we won't need the sequence. Each person will be able to peruse the information and select what he or she wants.

"I'm hoping that through the computer screen we'll be able to liberate kids from the tyranny of the curriculum. There should be no prerequisites (for studying certain things). The necessity for them is only administrative."

There's also a practical side to the development of the home computer, Nelson says.

"We know we'll run out of paper by the year 2000. Then what?"

KEN GIGLIOTTI/WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Ted Nelson hopes to franchise the information system he is developing for home computers.

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